

THE WASHINGTON STAR (GREEN LINE)
17 February 1978

Watch Soviet Civil Defense, Pentagon Warns Hill Panel

By Henry S. Bradsher

Washington Star Staff Writer

The head of the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency says the Soviet Union might "alter the strategic military relationship" with the United States by military efforts that include a large civil defense program.

Lt. Gen. Samuel V. Wilson told a congressional committee that the change could put the United States at a disadvantage by the mid-1980s.

CIA Director Stansfield Turner told the committee the Soviets do not presently "possess a civil defense capability that would enable them to feel that they could with reasonable expectation absorb a retaliatory strike at levels of damage that would be acceptable to them."

But, Turner added, "the Soviet Union is making more progress and effort in civil defense today than is the United States." While Wilson's concern was with the future, Turner dealt reassuringly only with the current situation.

NEITHER OFFICIAL'S testimony to the Joint Economic Committee, given secretly last June and made public in edited form today, dealt with Soviet efforts to develop an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defense system as part of the overall program that includes civil defense. Wilson

noted, however, that civil defense was related to "various offensive and defensive measures."

A secret new Pentagon study has stirred increasing concern in the Carter administration over Soviet success in developing all the components for a workable ABM system. If such a system were deployed — in violation of a Soviet-American treaty — it could protect the Soviet Union from some warheads launched in a U.S. retaliatory attack.

With ABM cover, a civil defense system, by itself, insufficient to offer meaningful protection against an unimpeded missile attack, would become a major element in the Kremlin's military posture. Wilson suggested the new way the parts would fit together could alter the balance of terror that exists between the two superpowers.

PRESIDENT CARTER announced last March that Moscow had agreed to discuss the possibility of an agreement to curtail civil defense work as part of disarmament efforts. But the Soviets have not seemed eager to get the talks going, and the administration has not yet decided on its own negotiating position.

The National Security Council is nearing completion of work on a presidential review memorandum on civil defense, using material from the intelligence community and other parts of the administration. The United States now has virtually no civil defense program to protect the American people from nuclear attack. The study is considering whether this country needs a modern program.

Officials have described Carter as hoping to talk the Soviets out of their program so as to avoid the possibility of having to match it with a vastly expensive American program. But the Soviet military mentality has traditionally emphasized defensive measures, and many Soviet affairs analysts doubt that the Kremlin might be dissuaded from its program.

THE DIFFERENCE in testimony between Wilson and Turner on the Soviet effort appeared to reflect not only their time frames but also an institutional conflict that has existed for several years.

DIA has long been warning that the Soviets were preparing extensive protection for its population and its industries. CIA ignored the subject until it suddenly began in 1976 to be seen as part of the strategic balance. Then rush efforts were made by the CIA to find out what the Soviets were doing.

This produced a CIA study last autumn that concluded Soviet civil defense had not significantly affected the Kremlin's willingness to wage war but did deserve to be taken seriously. The Soviet program had slowed down in the last few years, the CIA found.

Some other analysts denied the slowdown. They argued that by suddenly examining the accumulated Soviet efforts the CIA had misjudged the long-term nature of the program.